

Rep. Peter Welch took to the House floor Thursday afternoon to fight legislation that threatens rural airports throughout the country, including the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport.

A provision in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2011 (H.R. 658) would eliminate the Essential Air Services (EAS) program starting in 2013. The EAS program provides funding for approximately 140 rural communities throughout the country that would otherwise not have scheduled air service. In 2010, service to and from the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport to Boston Logan International Airport received \$797,141 under the EAS program.

"Eliminating this program would deal a devastating blow to the Rutland region," Welch said. "The Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport connects the Rutland region to the national air transportation system, sustains local jobs and spurs economic activity. Simply put, this bill represents an abandonment of our long-standing commitment to America's rural communities."

"The potential negative impact of the reduction in EAS funding for both the City of Rutland and the entire region simply cannot be understated," said Rutland City Mayor Christopher Louras in a letter to Welch. "It is critical to the well-being of the region's economy and already inadequate transportation system that the federal government continues to fund this program at a level, and in such a manner, that allows the airport's EAS provider to credibly continue operations."

Welch proposed an amendment to preserve the EAS program, which was rejected by House leadership. Welch is now working to defeat H.R. 658, which is expected to come to a vote tomorrow.